

VZCZCXRO8759

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DE RUEHBZ #0017/01 0150833

ZNR UUUUU ZZH

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FM AMEMBASSY BRAZZAVILLE

TO RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC

INFO RUEHZO/AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE

RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME 0072

RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0529

RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0090

RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS 0075

RUEHBZ/AMEMBASSY BRAZZAVILLE 2114

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BRAZZAVILLE 000017

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [UNHCR](#) [WFP](#) [CT](#) [CF](#) [CG](#)

SUBJECT: REFUGEE UPDATE-NEARLY 107,000 DRC REFUGEES IN THE LIKOUALA REGION OF CONGO-B

REF: A. A. 09 BRAZZAVILLE 362 AND PREVIOUS

[¶](#)B. B. KINSHASA 026 AND PREVIOUS

[¶](#)C. C. 09 BANGUI 274 AND PREVIOUS

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[¶](#)11. (U) According to UNHCR Brazzaville, the number of displaced in Congo-Brazzaville now totals 106,674. There are approximately 15,000 additional displaced persons in the Central African Republic. Although the displaced population has grown by nearly 20,000 since the last report (REF A), anecdotal evidence from the region indicates that the situation in the DRC has begun to stabilize. UNHCR reports that artillery fire from the DRC Army (FARDC) can no longer be heard in Congo-B and that the FARDC have retaken control of Dongo and the other villages along the DRC side of the Oubangui. According to UNHCR, FARDC has also announced that they have captured the witch doctor rebel leader, General Odjani. The American missionary hospital in Impfondo confirms that there has been no fighting in their area since December 31. Accurate reporting on the situation on the ground in the DRC, however, is complicated by the fact that the UNHCR has not been allowed to return to Dongo and the surrounding area of the Equateur Province since late October 2009.

[¶](#)12. (U) Despite the improvements in the DRC, the humanitarian situation on the ROC side of the river remains challenging. With little prospect for a quick return to DRC, the relief effort is beginning to focus on efforts to meet the mid to long term needs of the displaced. Although the GROC still has not recognized the displaced as refugees, they have begun to take the necessary steps to meet their long term needs. On 12 January, the GROC gave the final approval to move forward with the construction of a "settlement center" in Betou allowing approximately 6,000 displaced persons to be relocated to a new area that will greatly improve their living conditions. UNHCR says work on the settlement will begin immediately and expects the new site to be ready in two weeks. Additionally, the GROC recently authorized the UNHCR to begin a formal registration process of the entire displaced population. UNHCR plans to begin registration on January 15 and expects the process to take about one month.

[¶](#)14. (U) The UN system is also making preparations for the mid and long term needs of the displaced. In addition to the efforts of UNHCR to relocate and register the displaced, the UNHCR has also doubled the size of their staff in the region. Last week, UNICEF shipped an additional 20 tons of supplies to the region which included school kits recreation equipment for the children among the displaced. After distributing an initial 455 tons of food to meet the needs of the displaced between two and four weeks, the WFP is now requesting an additional 11,020 tons of food (Note: WFP based this request on an estimated population of 94k displaced). Although there have been several recent press reports stating that the UN has made an appeal for additional

funds from donors, no formal appeal has been made. Stephan Grieb at UNHCR, however, says that a formal appeal should be expected in the next two weeks. According to Grieb, scaling up operations in this remote region has nearly exhausted available funds.

¶5. (U) Since the last report (REF A), the only announcements of additional aid from the international community have been the U.S. pledge of up to \$4.6 million dollars of food for the World Food Programme and 200,000 Euros from the French government for food and non-food items following the French Foreign Minister's visit to Brazzaville on January 8-9. The French have also promised to fly two cargo plane rotations to help move supplies to the region. Total international contributions to date are summarized below:

Italy-300,000 Euro
European Union-2,000,000 Euro
France-200,000 Euro (+logistical support)
U.S.-up to 4,600,000 USD

¶6. (SBU) COMMENT: During the first weeks of this crisis, the GROC seemed to hope that the displaced would quickly return home. For the first two weeks of November, the GROC refused to discuss any plans beyond the first 30 days of the crisis and rumors circulated that the GROC was making plans to prevent additional people from crossing into Congo-Brazzaville. As the magnitude of the crisis has grown, however, the GROC appears to have reached the conclusion that even if the FARDC restore order in the DRC, it is increasingly unlikely that there will be a quick return across the Oubangui. Many of the DRC refugees actually fled when the FARDC arrived, and will likely wait until the situation has been stable for some time before returning. The GROC now considers the displaced to be refugees in everything but name. The government continues to work closely with the UN System to coordinate the relief effort and provide security for the refugees. Now that the GROC has authorized a formal registration, it seems likely that the GROC will formally

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recognize the displaced as refugees in the near future.
EASTHAM